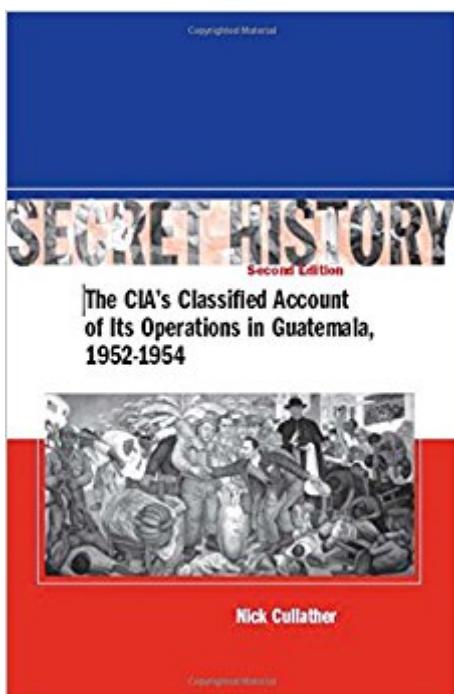


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Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account Of Its Operations In Guatemala 1952-1954



Synopsis

The first edition of this book, published in 1999, was well-received, but interest in it has surged in recent years. It chronicles an early example of "regime change" that was based on a flawed interpretation of intelligence and proclaimed a success even as its mistakes were becoming clear. Since 1999, a number of documents relating to the CIA's activities in Guatemala have been declassified, and a truth and reconciliation process has unearthed other reports, speeches, and writings that shed more light on the role of the United States. For this edition, the author has selected and annotated twenty-one documents for a new documentary Appendix, including President Clinton's apology to the people of Guatemala.

Book Information

Paperback: 176 pages

Publisher: Stanford University Press; 2 edition (November 6, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0804754683

ISBN-13: 978-0804754682

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.6 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #169,762 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #14 in Books > History > Americas > Central America > Guatemala #129 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Caribbean & Latin American #171 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Latin America

Customer Reviews

"Nick Cullather sheds new light on an old regime change, assisted by documents initially made public during the tenure of former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director (and current Secretary of Defense) Robert Gates. Cullather's work is concise, detailed, and eminently readable...In summary, Cullather provides a realistic and nuanced view of an otherwise well-covered operation, seen through the eyes of the agency that led PBSUCCESS...For students of Latin America and U.S. national security policymaking in the region, Cullather has done a great service." (Mark Montesclaros, Department of Joint, Interagency and Multinational Operations U.S. Army Command and General Staff College)

The first edition of this book, published in 1999, was well-received, but interest in it has surged in recent years. It chronicles an early example of “regime change” that was based on a flawed interpretation of intelligence and proclaimed a success even as its mistakes were becoming clear. Since 1999, a number of documents relating to the CIA’s activities in Guatemala have been declassified, and a truth and reconciliation process has unearthed other reports, speeches, and writings that shed more light on the role of the United States. For this edition, the author has selected and annotated twenty-one documents for a new documentary Appendix, including President Clinton’s apology to the people of Guatemala.

This book is really interesting and full of useful information. I used it along with some other sources to write a paper on the Guatemalan coup. I cited this book several times.

I bought this book for a class and just dove straight into it once we began reading it. It Gabe’s amazing insight into the ability of the United States to influence smaller countries (and probably even larger, more powerful ones as well).

Good record of critical history, by the CIA.

C’mom team USA. Decades of dirty war after chiquitas cia coup. Totally went bananas. Kudos to cia for this research. Got call f friend who got book.

asdf

Extremely boring.

This is the reprint, Stanford also produced the original version, A Secret History: The CIA’s Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954. I bought that one used and not only loved the speed of delivery, but the notes from the previous owner. My next review will cover A The CIA in Iran: The 1953 Coup and the Origins of the US-Iran Trade. The two “successes” would both be condemned by history, but more pointedly, led to the CIA misadventures in Cuba, Chile, the Philippines, Viet-Nam, and so on. There is a great deal in this book that I was not aware of, and that is with 294 reviews tagged Intelligence (Government/Secret) at Phi Beta Iota the Public Intelligence Blog, all leading back to their page. In a nutshell, PBSUCCESS was a stunningly

inept widely known endeavor penetrated across multiple points by the Guatemalan government, which succeeded only because the Army lost its nerve and deposed their own elected President. Especially new to me were the US Navy blockage of the Guatemalan ports (one on each coast), and the failure of CIA-trained " saboteurs" to derail the shipment of arms from the port to the capital city that the President was able to procure despite a global US embargo on arms for Guatemala. This is a book I really appreciate and strongly recommend to anyone who wants to understand the nuts and bolts of "covert action" in close association with the idiocy and lack of ethics in the US Government then (and now). The author was "the" CIA historian for PBSUCCESS in Guatemala, his notes are superb, and this is a classic study that demonstrates what is possible if and when we ever have an honest US Government willing to abide by the Congressional and Department of State demands for declassifying the history of our clandestine and covert operations. Two quotes from the poignant forward by the author, which also laments the fact that no "truth dividend" ever came of the end of the Cold War: QUOTE (xii): Having done so little historical research of its own, the agency had to rely on accounts by historians with no access to classified documents, and its training program suffered from its own efforts to conceal and distort the public record. QUOTE (xiii): "a careless disregard for the past that is perhaps natural in an agency where the only valuable information is minutes or at most hours old." The author himself highlights Guatemala as "setting the pattern," and also points out that the money trail side of this book has never been done. Throughout the book one develops an appreciation for the covert action and corruption actions of United Fruit that were better funded and better managed than CIA's fledgling efforts. Guatemala was the beginning, the author tells us, of CIA's routine use of assassination, especially in the form of murder for contrived political gain. Appendix C, "A Study of Assassination," is the short front-end of CIA Historian Gerald K. Haines 1995 work, "CIA and Guatemala Assassination Proposals, 1952-1954." Guatemala was, the author states, an early example of the CIA using intensive (and expensive) paramilitary and psychological operations to displace a popular elected leader. This was--with Iran--the beginning of "regime change" as a core element of a broadly unethical, mostly idiotic, and generally corrupt US foreign policy (see my reviews of 86 books on diplomacy at Phi Beta Iota). See also, for the "rules of the game" that include "lie to the President if you can get away with it," Morton Halperin's still seminal *Â Bureaucratic Politics And Foreign Policy*. Before doing my detailed notes, I want to jump to the Afterword, "The Culture of Fear," by Piero Gleijeses. QUOTE (ix): Violence, torture, and death are the final arbiters of Guatemalan society, the gods that determine behavior. After describing a long series of military dictatorships spawned by the US Government's intervention in Guatemala, the author observes that

even the occasional "elected" president is nothing more than a puppet.QUOTE (xxvi): Cerezo and his party won at the polls, but they were only the props of the upper class and the army.QUOTE (xxxii): [Guatemala] still has the most regressive fiscal system and the most unequal land ownership pattern in Latin America. Its army, victorious on the battlefield, has evolved into an all-powerful mafia, stretching its tentacles into drug-trafficking, kidnapping, and smuggling. And its civilian presidents have shown no inclination to challenge the army and the upper class, to fight for social reform, or to clamp down on corruption. Today Hungary is free. Guatemala is still paying for the American "success."Now for just a few notes from a book that is as thoughtfully developed and well foot-noted as any:+ US paranoia about communism, combined with the well-funded campaigns of United Fruit both within the US political circles and in Guatemala, combined to end Guatemala's move in a progressive direction.+ QUOTE (9-10): [Dictator] Ubico (whom the extremist mayor of Guatemala has just honored with a road naming) "suppressed dissent, legalized the killing of Indians by landlords, enlarged the Army, and organized a personal gestapo.+ Ubico also gifted massive amounts of land to United Fruit, just one more reason why Guatemala, like Australia, needs a Native Title Act as well as land reform.+ I learn that in the aftermath of WWII there was a general move toward progressive regimes, with teachers playing a key role. Guatemala elected a university professor, Juan Jose Arevalo, as President.+ US ignorance about Guatemala is described as profound--in training the Army and in evaluating the political parties, the US balanced extreme ignorance about all things with extreme paranoia that any leftist was a communist in the making.+ In a preamble to Carter/Brzezinski pushing Guatemala toward Israel's arms industry, in the earlier years the US and its heavy-handed policies pushed Guatemala to buy arms from Czechoslovakia.+ Arbenz, the deposed president, was born of a Swiss father and Guatemalan mother; married a US-educated Salvadoran, and was intellectually and socially concerned to the point of advocating reforms in his earlier role as Minister of Defense.+ US and Catholic Church sided with the oligarchs. Fast forward to the Pope condemning liberation theology today--we have Nazis in the Vatican and the US Government!+ CIA's ignorance about land reform is breath-taking. They fought it because they saw it as a "communist" conspiracy to create collectives, and they also supported it as an antidote to communist collectives.+ CIA assumed Moscow links, history has demonstrated that there were NONE less one attempt to buy bananas.+ Guatemala was solemnly declared to be a "threat to US national security" and I am reminded of the Mexican president who told his idiot counterpart US president that he could not go along with declaring Cuba to be a national security threat or tens of millions of Mexicans would die laughing.+ The ignorance of both CIA case officers and analysts boggles the minds and reminds me of Evan Thomas'Ã The Very Best Men: Four

Who Dared: The Early Years of the CIA--well-intentioned dolts.+ Arbenz had the entire CIA operation penetrated thanks to a walk-in from Panama. He ultimately exposed the operation (by then everyone who could read in Latin America knew of it) but made a huge error in forging materials to back up his story.+ Students were used as bait by the CIA, intended to invite harmful repression (CIA's version of collateral damage), at which point the intervention would be launched.+ DEEP INSIGHT: CIA was bluffing. Arbenz was led to believe that the entire US Government was participating in the invasion, but in fact CIA was having trouble moving two airplanes and their paid for bad boy had only 480 men.+ Three days into the invasion, two of the four 100-person columns were turned back, one of them by the police of El Salvador.+ Guatemala got the UN to object and pass a resolution, but by then the Army officers had pooped in their pants and decided to oust the president to save their own skins. The president was deposed by his own people at precisely the same time that CIA's operation was collapsing beyond salvation.+ Five juntas followed, each more subject to American pressure, all of them inept, repressive, and corrupt. The book concludes "the US was guilty of wanton criminal neglect." Here are four quotes and then some additional recommended reading.QUOTE (109): Had the Guatemalan Army crushed Castillo Armas at Chiquimula, as it easily could have done, investigations would have uncovered the chronic lapses in [CIA] security, the failure to plan beyond the operation's first stages, the Agency's poor understanding of the intentions of the Army, the PGT [the communist party of Guatemala], and the government, the hopeless weakness of Castillo Arma's troops, and the failure to make provisions for the possibility of defeat.QUOTE (112): In Latin America, the Arbenz regime's demise left an enduring legacy of anti-Americanism.QUOTE (113): Castillo Armas completed his lunge to the right by disenfranchising illiterates (two-thirds of the electorate), cancelling land reform, and outlawing all political parties, labor confederations, and peasant organizations."QUOTE (117): In Guatemala, US officials learned a lesson they would relearn in Vietnam, Iran, [REDACTED], and other countries: intervention usually produces "allies" that are stubborn, aid-hungry, and corrupt. Seven other books:Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIAOverthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to IraqOpen Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a ContinentSAVAGE CAPITALISM AND THE MYTH OF DEMOCRACY: Latin America in the Third MillenniumConfessions of an Economic Hit ManNone So Blind: A Personal Account of the Intelligence Failure in VietnamSee my other reviews at Phi Beta Iota, especially on capitalism, pathology of power, etcetera. Now to end on a positive note (see the List of Book Reviews (Positive) at Phi Beta Iota):1. The truth at any cost reduces all other costs.2. Machine guns cannot kill cockroaches.3. When the cockroaches all have cell phones, the Earth will be back in balance.

This book is fantastic. A great CIA sponsored text, describing the CIA's mission to destabilize and overthrow the Guatemalan government in the 50s. Built ALMOST COMPLETELY out of internal CIA documents, the purpose of the book was to provide the CIA with a template for future intervention missions. When you read this, you really start to get a feel for what the CIA would do in the future. A must read for anyone with a serious interest in US Foreign Policy.

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